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Facing the Future

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana) to be Delivered at the
Conference of American Women in Radio and Television
Caucus Room, Old Senate Office Building
Friday, May 5, 1961, 10:00 A.M.

I want to welcome you to Washington. You will find this city stimulating because this is a stimulating time in the history of our country. You will also find that it is a serious city, because these are serious times for us all.

Old problems are being tackled anew. In almost every domestic and foreign field there is in progress an energetic re-examination of the existing situation. The Administration is already in the process of making a fresh start in redirecting the nation along more realistic and constructive lines. That is the significance of the many Presidential messages which have been delivered to the Congress. The message on defense policy submitted to Congress by the President on March 28, for example, is the most complete restatement of defense policy in many years. It is one sign of the fresh thinking which has been put forth by the Administration on reconstructing and reshaping our national programs.

It is well to remember, however, that no administration begins with a clean slate. Each new administration inherits a given structure of policies and a particular set of circumstances. Our governmental machinery is vast and complex--too vast in my opinion--and, whatever ideas the President may inject at the top, it will be some time before they emerge as visible changes in the nation.

The first 100 days of a new administration is not a significant period by which to measure accomplishment. I suppose one could point out that the numerical record of the completed acts of this Senate is far

heavier than that of eight years ago when there was last a change in administrations. But quantity is not significant in itself.

The only test will come four years hence, when the people of the United States ask themselves: Is the nation more secure in a securer world? Are we better off at home in our opportunities for the pursuit of happiness in the fullest sense of the word happiness?

That change does not come quickly or easily is particularly evident in foreign policy. In the case of Cuba, for example, the roots of the present situation reach deep into the past, even beyond the previous administration. And the way out of the difficulties has obviously not yet been found. In the case of Laos, by contrast, there is a glimmer of hope for a rational solution which stems in part from a new approach to this problem introduced by the President some weeks ago, and also, of course, a hope which owes much to President Eisenhower's abstention from the commitment of U.S. military forces to that nation during the last weeks of his administration.

The same continuity exists with respect to domestic affairs in these times. When Administrations changed hands in 1933, the problem was one of creating new institutions to meet critical and long-neglected national, economic and social needs. By comparison, in 1961 most of the necessary institutions are already in existence, and the problem is one of reshaping and redirecting these institutions--adding to them or cutting them down as necessary but, above all, giving them a new vitality and dynamism--so that they will act effectively to meet the nation's present requirements. This is a much more difficult task in many respects than the creation of new institutions.

We have good reason to feel very hopeful about the progress of the new Administration, and about prospects for the months and years ahead. The recent doldrums are not at an end. We may not even have come to the beginning of the end. But we are arriving, I believe, at the end of the beginning of this Administration and there is reason to look forward to a renewed sense of purpose and a new period of national progress.

In international matters, particularly, the critical nature of the times places great responsibility not only on those who represent the American people in government, but also on those of you engaged in the communication and interpretation of the news. The United States can act effectively in these matters only if there is adequate and accurate public awareness of the realities of the world situation, and public comprehension of the problems which these realities pose for foreign policy. This, in turn, requires accurate communication and perceptive interpretation by radio and television stations throughout the country. It is unfortunate, when reporting is inaccurate. It is unfortunate when interpretation not only lacks perception but sometimes borders on the deliberately misleading. You are honest enough, I know, to recognize that your profession is not entirely free from these distortions. Nevertheless, it is my considered opinion that there are greater dangers to the nation in restricting the flow of public information because of these possible distortions than there is in the distortions themselves. Similarly, there are occasions, no doubt, when our free press makes the intelligence job of other nations easier. Nevertheless, there is such a great need under our system for the people of the nation to have access to the independent reporting and responsible

interpretation which has generally characterized American radio and television, as well as newspapers and magazines, that I for one am prepared to see us assume the high measure of the risks which are inherent in a free press. I am prepared to rely on the basic good sense and patriotism of the great preponderance of the Members of the Fourth Estate. This Estate, may I add, is the unofficial 4th branch of the government--with powers second to none--and whose sense of responsibility, therefore, should also be second to none.

Again, I welcome you to Washington and wish all of you an interesting visit and every success in your efforts through radio and television to enrich and enhance the understanding of our people.